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Summary

Ethiopia and Sudan: Political Ramifications of Emergency Aid

Summary

Humanitarian aid for drought afflicted people in Ethiopia and Sudan is linked with complex political considerations for the governments of those countries, aid donor nations, and international and non-governmental relief organizations. Donors and relief agencies demand a commitment of resources from Ethiopia and Sudan that those countries sometimes believe is not in their best interest or is impossible to deliver. In the current crisis atmosphere, where communications between the numerous players range between difficult and nonexistent, competing national directives and interests have caused stressful and divisive exchanges between the parties in spite of a mutually held goal of staving off starvation for millions of people. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared for Donald Gregg, Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs. It was written by [redacted] of the Office of African and Latin American Analysis. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Regional Issues Branch, Africa Division, ALA, [redacted]

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Dimensions of the Tragedy

An estimated 7.5 million to possibly 9 million people are threatened by famine in Ethiopia, of which some 2 to 3 million are out of reach of most aid donors in the contested northern provinces. An additional 525,000 to 575,000 Ethiopian drought victims are refugees in eastern Sudan, according to estimates by the US Embassy in Khartoum. Observers projected early in 1985 that 250,000 to 300,000 more refugees would cross the Sudanese border by July; by late February some were speculating that the numbers could be as high as 500,000 or more. [REDACTED]

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At the same time that Ethiopians are seeking refuge in Sudan, drought there also has reached crisis proportions, with the possibility that 4 million Sudanese will be affected by next summer, according to a January report from the US Embassy in Khartoum. Large numbers of Sudanese have already been left their traditional homes and grazing areas, some entering the refugee camps along with the Ethiopians in the east and the Chadian refugees in western Sudan, others clustered around population centers looking for food. Near the end of January relief workers estimated that there already were 300,000 to 400,000 homeless and needy people in western Sudan alone, of whom about 80 percent were Sudanese and 20 percent were Chadian refugees. [REDACTED]

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As more people are engulfed in the growing crises, estimates of food deficits undoubtedly will be reassessed and revised upwards. Currently, the estimated Ethiopian food shortfall for December 1984 to December 1985 is 1.2 million metric tons of grain and 100,000 metric tons of supplementary foods, according to an FAO assessment. The Sudanese food grain deficit is between 1.4 million and 2 million metric tons, as assessed by a multidonor mission and by US aid officials. An additional 160,000 metric tons is required at a minimum to support the refugee population in Sudan. [REDACTED]

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Ethiopia and the Famine Relief Situation

2 The Ethiopians have insisted for many months, and restated recently in briefings to states friendly to them, that they were distributing as much emergency food assistance as possible to alleviate immediate starvation, and they were moving ahead with a resettlement program designed to move people from the drought-stricken north to southern areas that offer the possibility of immediate agricultural production. Although all agree that the first priority is to deliver food to the starving, there is widespread concern among donors that Ethiopia is not currently reaching all possible recipients with relief

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goods. Many charge that the government of Ethiopia is as much an impediment to successful food distribution as are the physical constraints of insufficient port capacity, poor transport, and difficult terrain. The Ethiopian government, according to reporting from the US Embassy in Addis Ababa, has boarded at least three ships in Ethiopian ports and seized relief shipments destined for the cross-border effort in Sudan; it has given priority to the unloading of arms from Soviet ships over the unloading of foodstuffs; and it has held up in-country travel permits for bilateral and international relief staffs, making it difficult to monitor food distributions and to assess growing needs.

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The issue of perhaps most pressing concern is the inability of either the Ethiopian government or relief organizations to deliver the quantity of food needed by the two to three million people at risk in the contested areas of the north. Not nearly enough food and relief assistance are available in regions outside government control to stop the spread of starvation, as attested to by the increasing flow of severely malnourished refugees to Sudan. Inside Ethiopia, the needy must either depend on the relatively small amounts of food that are distributed from Sudan through the cross-border feeding programs or go to the government feeding centers in major towns and along main roads in government controlled areas. So far, neither donor nations nor the UN has been able to arrange safe passage either for scheduled relief convoys and flights to the north or to assure the safety of refugee movements. Ethiopian officials have insisted to various international relief officials that they are delivering enough food to feed the needy in the north and that they will neither negotiate safe passage or allow relief organizations to operate in contested areas, actions which they fear would tacitly recognize the legitimacy of the rebels and strengthen the insurgency. As far as the current situation is concerned:

- In February, a US official observing conditions in Eritrea was told by Ethiopian relief agency spokesmen that out of a population of 2.6 million, about one-half are drought-affected, nearly half a million more persons than that agency reported as drought-affected in December 1984. Furthermore, the Ethiopians said that almost all wells in the region were dry, and that local foods were almost nonexistent. While feeding and food distribution at the 25 government food centers appeared to be adequate, US officials believe that the extensive areas not under government control are receiving little aid.
- Feeding operations organized from Sudan are one of the few options available to increase food supplies in contested areas, according to US officials. While an integral part of the present US program, some donors, citing the increasingly vehement objections of the Ethiopians, believe the risks in increasing this effort are too high

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for Sudan, donors, relief organizations, and for the refugees. Given the enormity of the overall problem, these donors believe reaching even some 80 percent of the population in need, which they say can be done without cross-border feeding, may be an acceptable goal at this time. [redacted]

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[redacted] in the face of difficult logistical problems only about 500,000 can be helped by cross-border feeding--but without the program hundreds of thousands might not receive any aid at all. [redacted]

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3.4 A further stress on the relief effort is the Ethiopian resettlement policy, which is proving to be highly divisive in the donor community. Ethiopia characterizes resettlement as moving people away from overpopulated, unproductive, desertified land to sparsely populated, fertile areas that offer the possibility of immediate agricultural development. We believe however, the government also views resettlement as a means to undercut the dissident support base and advance agricultural collectivization. Addis Ababa, with Soviet assistance, has met its initial goal of resettling several hundred thousand persons in the south and has publically announced its plans to resettle a total of 1.5 million this year. The Australians and some European donors, according to US Embassy reporting, are inclined to support resettlement, seeing it as one possible answer to Ethiopia's seemingly intractable agricultural problems. Moreover, if resettlement goes forward, they recognize that humanitarian assistance will be required until the settlements become productive. The United States has told other donors and the Ethiopians that it will not assist resettlement efforts as part of the drought crisis effort, believing the program siphons off governmental energies that should be devoted to ameliorating starvation. It also charges that the program is politically motivated and that it is not voluntary. [redacted]

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Sudanese Drought and Refugee Crises

8.9.10 While Ethiopian famine was the focus of initial attention from the media and aid donors, Sudan's food and refugee conditions have emerged as an equally serious problem. Early this year the Sudanese Government declared the needs of drought-afflicted Sudanese in the western provinces as its first priority and solicited US and other donor support. US emergency food is currently being distributed in the west to all in need, Sudanese displaced populations and Chadian refugees alike. According to relief officials, the needy populations are frequently found in very remote areas that are inaccessible by most roads or by air. The delivery of relief supplies is further complicated by the great distance these areas are from the ports of entry of relief goods and by limited transportation and communication networks. Coordination among donors is extremely difficult and increasingly inefficient as the crisis grows on Sudan's western and eastern borders.

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-- Contributions to fill the food deficit for Sudan of 1.4 million metric tons estimated by a multidonor assessment team under UN auspices are underpledged by 601,000 metric tons. By early February the US had committed 748,000 metric tons and other donors 76,000 metric tons of the total need. A good share of the food will have to be prepositioned near the at-risk population concentrations before May rains make the roads impassable. The need for water, shelter, health care, and sanitation provisions in addition to food aid is straining the capabilities of already overburdened and harrassed donors. [redacted]

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Sudan is further beset by the presence of well over half a million Ethiopian refugees, serious economic problems, and an insurgency, factors the US Embassy in Khartoum believes puts the Ethiopian refugee problem low on Sudan's list of priorities. Sudan has indicated, according to the Embassy [redacted] that its responsibility for the Ethiopian refugees is discharged by allowing entry to Sudan and providing some relief coordination through the Sudanese national relief agency. Beyond that, according to the Sudanese, refugee care should be financed by the international donor community and managed so as to minimize any negative impact on Sudanese living standards and to preclude antagonisms between Sudanese and the refugees. While sympathetic to the Sudanese dilemma, donors have urged a more efficient and quick response from the Sudanese relief managers. [redacted]

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Despite the risk of further tensions in bilateral relations with Ethiopia, the Sudanese have supported cross-border feeding operations into northern Ethiopia in an effort at least to slow the refugee flow into Sudan. The Ethiopian government argues that these operations benefit the insurgents and has threatened to attack cross-border relief efforts into rebel-held areas. Political relations between Ethiopia and Sudan are increasingly tense, according to the US Embassy in Khartoum. [redacted]

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Outlook

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The magnitude of the drought-induced disaster, in our judgment, is just emerging. The Ethiopian refugees are not likely to leave the comparative safety of the Sudanese camps without some assurance that crops can be planted in Ethiopia, that they will be sustained in their home areas with food, implements, and seeds, and that they will not be threatened by civil disorder or government retaliation. For both Ethiopians and displaced Sudanese the rains in April and May in their home areas will determine the start of any movement to leave the camps. The Embassy reports that the Sudanese government expects most of the refugees to stay in the camps through 1985, or at least until any crops that might be planted this spring show promise of an adequate harvest late next fall. Therefore, their continuing presence in Sudan probably will require the continued efforts of the aid donor groups at present or higher levels at least through 1985. Only a skillful handling of food and water

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shortages within Sudan will maintain a semblance of stability in the relationships between the refugees and the indigenous population. []

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1 We expect the donor nations and organizations to improve their coordination of relief efforts. Experience gleaned from working their way through these first chaotic months of emergency operations should help to put in place a more efficient operation in both Ethiopia and Sudan. The scope of the disaster is only now being perceived, however, and a heightened effort in health care, shelter, and a larger and more varied food ration for what almost certainly will be a larger refugee population will stretch the economic and physical limits of all donors. []

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13 Allegations that emergency humanitarian programs are being used for political goals already strain relations between Ethiopia and Sudan, differences which are likely to worsen as the crisis grows. Both countries suspect that refugee populations have been infiltrated with subversives, that camps are used as rebel sanctuaries, and that relief goods are used to further anti-regime activities. []

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11, 13 The cross-border feeding program is at the center of the controversy and is likely to remain so. Ethiopia accuses Sudan and the aid donors to the program, especially the United States, of violating its territorial integrity and of delivering aid to anti-regime factions in the north. Donors counter that the operation is humanitarian and would not be attempted if aid could reach northern Ethiopians in any other way. In the face of Ethiopia's insistence that the program be discontinued and the belief by donors that hundreds of thousands will die if it were stopped or curtailed, the cross-border program--among the many that are under the international aid umbrella--is potentially the most dangerous for all participating parties. Based on Mengistu's public statements and numerous diplomatic demarches, we believe that Ethiopia is prepared to use military force to disrupt the flow of supplies into the northern provinces, endangering the lives of the international relief corps as well as Ethiopian recipients. []

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